[redacted]

Bolivia: Prospects for Gueiler [redacted]

Conservative military opponents of interim President Gueiler pose a continuing threat to the general elections scheduled for June. Powerful and united--at least in their opposition to Gueiler--the group is seeking justification for her ouster. [redacted]

The most notable plotter is Brig. Gen. Luis Garcia Meza, commandant of the military academy in La Paz and head of the Army during the short-lived Natusch regime. His prominence stems from the firm stand he took in keeping the Army under hardline control following the ouster of Natusch last fall. The power of Gueiler's commander in chief of the armed forces, Gen. Armando Reyes Villa, apparently does not equal that of his nominal subordinate--Reyes is unable either to discipline Garcia Meza or effect the transfer of his key regimental supporters in La Paz. [redacted]

Among the factors that so far have deterred the plotters is Gueiler's political adroitness. She personally negotiated with labor and peasant leaders to quiet rural unrest over needed economic austerity measures. The President also hammered out congressional approval for general elections--despite the majority party's desire to elect only a president and vice president. To date, no obvious political failure can be blamed on her. [redacted]

Moreover, the plotters appear reluctant to move against Gueiler in the absence of something approaching public repudiation of her administration; widespread public opposition helped undermine Natusch shortly after he seized power. The conservatives' strategy stresses patience, based on the assumption that despite the current calm, the internal political situation will inevitably deteriorate and lead to public acceptance of--or at least indifference toward--a military takeover. [redacted]

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The plotters also are concerned about possible US reaction to a coup--with the potential interruption of economic aid programs. In recent weeks, however, several hardline officers have downplayed the importance of US recognition, claiming that Washington would eventually recognize their military government. Some even dismiss the US factor, contending that Brazilian and Argentine recognition would confer needed legitimacy.

Although they hesitate, the conservative officers nonetheless remain a menace to the government, forcing the President to devote much of her time to outmaneuvering them. The limits on the President's authority were underscored by the recent annual military assignments list: Gueiler was unable to remove known plotters from key command positions.

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